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Domestic and civic basilicas: between public and private space

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In a much-cited passage<sup>1</sup> Vitruvius writes (6.5.2):

*nobilibus vero qui honores magistratusque gerundo praestare debent officia civibus, faciunda sunt vestibula regalia alta, atria et peristyla amplissima, silvae ambulationesque laxiores ad decorem maiestatis perfectae, praeterea bybliothecae pinacothecae basilicae non dissimili modo quam publicorum operum magnificentia comparatae, quod in domibus eorum saepius et publica consilia et privata iudicia arbitriaque conficiuntur.*

But for noblemen, who in fulfilling the duties of their position and public office ought to provide services to the people, lofty vestibules in regal style should be built, very large peristyles and atria, wooded gardens and roomy pathways decorated as suits their status, and even libraries, picture galleries, and basilicas fitted out in a manner not unlike the magnificence of public buildings, because in these men's houses both private meetings and public judgments and arbitrations are frequently held.

The precise identification of the domestic spaces Vitruvius mentions here remains a mystery. His brief words regarding an ideal house are not particularly helpful to anyone hoping to discover a real 'domestic basilica' – that is, an actual space in a privately-owned, residential building which its users referred to as a 'basilica'.<sup>2</sup> Vitruvius usually associates the word with a particular architectural typology: the colonnaded hall best known to us from the civic

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<sup>1</sup> Important discussions of this ever-vexing passage include Coarelli 1989; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 1-16 and *passim*; Zaccaria Ruggiu 1995, 176-79; Gros 2004.

<sup>2</sup> On the problems facing anyone who hopes to attach names attested in our textual sources to archaeologically-preserved examples, see especially Allison 2001. Some possible claimants to the title 'domestic basilica' are discussed in Ward-Perkins 1954; Vetters 1978; Thèbert 1987; Gros 2004; and now Cunliffe 2013.

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basilicas found in Roman fora across the empire. In this chapter, I investigate the relationship between the domestic basilica Vitruvius describes here and the better-known civic basilica. I begin with a brief survey of what little we do know about domestic basilicas of Vitruvius' time and later: there is enough evidence to show that they were not a figment of his imagination, though it is not clear whether they always, or ever, took the form of colonnaded halls. But to understand how they worked as public or private space we must look back to the period in which the word "basilica" first appeared: the late 3rd and early 2nd c. B.C. This was a time of innovation in both public and private architecture, and the earliest civic basilicas have strong ties to the élite house. We usually think of domestic basilicas as evolving from civic basilicas, as householders imitated public buildings. But the basilica (certainly the name, and possibly even the typology) had always been at home in domestic space. Like the libraries and picture galleries Vitruvius mentions, basilicas could cross boundaries between public and private, both inside the Roman house and beyond.

In texts the word 'basilica' to describe a private space recurs in late antiquity. Sidonius Apollinaris had one in his villa, and there were no fewer than three in the villa of the Gordians just outside Rome.<sup>3</sup> But by this time the meaning of the word had changed, referring more to function than to architectural typology: late antique 'basilicas' did not necessarily have internal colonnades and clerestory lighting.<sup>4</sup> Sidonius' and the Gordians' basilicas probably looked something like the "private basilica" (a name assigned by the excavators) in the 5th c. House of the Hunt at Bulla Regia, where a long hall culminating in a central apse is flanked not by aisles but by a series of small rooms.<sup>5</sup>

Closer to Vitruvius' own day is the *tablinum* of the House of the Mosaic Atrium at Herculaneum. Here a central 'nave' is marked out by two rows of four pilasters, though the

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<sup>3</sup> Sid. Apoll. *Ep.* 2.2.8; SHA, *Gord.* 32.3. Ward-Perkins 1954, 74 collects the evidence.

<sup>4</sup> Ward-Perkins 1954, 75 provides a full discussion of the change.

<sup>5</sup> Plan and discussion can be found in Thèbert 1987, 334-39.

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first and last pair are engaged in the front and back walls of the room. A. Maiuri's reconstructions suggest that the pilasters should support a clerestory with large windows to let in light, giving the room a formal resemblance to the well-known typology of the civic basilica.<sup>6</sup> Scholars debate both the function and the nomenclature of this room. Situated directly in line with the *fauces*, it must be a reception space.<sup>7</sup> Maiuri identified it as an *oecus Aegyptius* (see further below).<sup>8</sup> What it cannot be is a private basilica of the type Vitruvius has in mind. Roughly eight metres square and constructed on pilasters rather than columns, it is hardly 'fitted out in a manner not unlike the magnificence of public buildings.' This should come as no surprise: even the richest inhabitants of Herculaneum never aspired to the kind of dwelling Vitruvius prescribes for the statesmen of Rome. Even so, they might have followed fashions set by the metropolitan elite, and it is not impossible that we might see in this room a watered-down imitation of the grand private basilicas Vitruvius has in mind.

The noble houses of Republican and early imperial Rome are long gone, many swallowed up soon after Vitruvius wrote by the imperial palaces on the Palatine. We know from Plutarch (*Publ.* 15.5) that the palace had its own "basilica", though it is not clear which of its great reception halls he means. In its plan the room at the NE corner of the Domus Flavia looks like a canonical basilica: two rows of columns divide it into aisles and a nave which leads up to an apse. The walls seem to be buttressed to support a vaulted roof, not a clerestory. Plutarch cites the palace's basilica for its splendour, which suggests that he actually means the larger hall immediately next door. This reception space (the 'aula regia')

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<sup>6</sup> Maiuri 1951; further discussion in Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 18-19; Welch 2003, 24-25; Gros 2004.

<sup>7</sup> *Contra* Gros 2004, 317, who points out that it is not associated with the richer suite of reception rooms further into the house. As Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 18-19 makes clear, the so-called *tablinum* was the most 'public' reception area, designed to impress a wide audience with access directly from the *fauces* and *atrium*; the rooms with a sea view would have been used to delight a more restricted set of guests.

<sup>8</sup> Maiuri 1951.

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has no obvious typological links with the basilica.<sup>9</sup> Whichever of these palatial reception halls was the basilica, it would be a stretch to call it private. But the decision to receive the emperors' petitioners in a room called a basilica arose from the world Vitruvius knew, in which rich householders used private basilicas to impress their guests.

The scanty parallels might tempt us to think that the private basilicas Vitruvius refers to were simply generous reception halls, rather than instances of the specific typology we know from civic basilicas. The Herculaneum example shows that forms reminiscent of the canonical basilica could be employed in domestic architecture, but the evidence from the Palatine suggests that the word could be applied loosely as early as the 1st c. A.D. Vitruvius, architect of the basilica at Fano, knew his typology, but we cannot use his passage to reconstruct lost private basilicas.

We are left with the imagined space of Vitruvius' text, and in this chapter I take a new approach, focussing on the implications of his linguistic choices. It is revealing that he uses the word 'basilica', ostensibly borrowed from the language of public architecture, for an imagined space in a residential context. The overlap in terminology, it turns out, is the result of an even more fundamental overlap between public and private space in the Roman house and beyond. Scholars, most recently P. Gros, have analysed the domestic basilica alongside other Roman forms of architecture and decoration (ranging from the use of marble to wall-paintings of theatrical sets to architectural pediments) which crossed boundaries between public and private.<sup>10</sup> Roman householders who used these forms, so the argument goes, deliberately borrowed from the repertoire of public architecture in order to attach the

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<sup>9</sup> For both halls, see Mar 2009, 255-58; Lancaster 2005, 187-88 has a full discussion of the controversy over their roofs, with references.

<sup>10</sup> Gros 2004.

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grandeur and dignity of public space to their own private domestic spaces.<sup>11</sup> This is true, but the transfer between public and private goes in both directions: when forms appear both in public and in private, how can we (or the original audience) know who is alluding to whom?

At one level, Vitruvius' text is clear: rooms called 'basilicas' should be built in elite houses. The basilicas he prescribes are private in the sense that they belong, legally, to individual householders, and form part of residential complexes. Their stated purpose, though, marks them as at least semi-public: they are needed to serve as spaces in which 'both private meetings and public judgments and arbitrations' can take place.<sup>12</sup> They must therefore be accessible to a larger group than just the household for events which may include both business which is public (in the sense of non-domestic) and business which is public (in the sense of carrying civic importance).

'Both private meetings and public judgments and arbitrations' is also a good description of the kind of activity which took place in civic basilicas, the columned halls which in Vitruvius' day stood on publicly-owned land adjacent to the fora of Rome and of most Italian towns. It was these civic basilicas which were characterized by *publicorum operum magnificentia*. Vitruvius himself describes them at 5.1.4 ff. under the heading of public buildings.<sup>13</sup> We know little of the domestic basilica beyond this passage of Vitruvius; by comparison, civic basilicas have been well studied.<sup>14</sup> A careful interrogation of civic basilicas can help illuminate the domestic basilicas to which he refers, and the role played by both as spaces which are neither entirely public nor entirely private.

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<sup>11</sup> Most fundamentally, Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 17-37. See also Coarelli 1983, on religious architecture; Beacham 2003, on stage sets; Welch 2006, on the use of enemy spoils as decoration.

<sup>12</sup> Vitruvius does not mean formal trials, which in his time (exceptional cases like Caesar's trial of Deiotarus aside) took place neither in houses nor in basilicas, but in the open air: Coarelli 2009; de Angelis 2010, 6-7 and 14-15 for specific consideration of the legal implications of this passage.

<sup>13</sup> Vitruvius describes the topic of book 5 as a whole at 4.9 as *communia opera*, at 5.praef.5 as *publicorum locorum... dispositiones*, and at 5.12.7 as *necessaria ad utilitatem in civitatibus publicorum locorum*.

<sup>14</sup> The most thorough treatment of the civic basilica as a building type is Nünnerich-Asmus 1994; see also Gros 1996, 235-60; on Republican examples in particular, Lackner 2008, 266-71.

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## Hellenistic models and architectural developments in the Middle Republic

The origin of the basilica as a building type is a hoary old problem unlikely to be solved any time soon. The word itself is Greek, but it is not attested as the name of a building type before the Romans take it up. It first appears in Plautus (end of the 3rd c. B.C.), who names a building on the north long side of the Forum Romanum simply as 'the basilica'.<sup>15</sup> The first for which we have reasonable evidence is the Basilica Porcia, built in 184 B.C.<sup>16</sup> Debate over the name, an adjective standing mysteriously alone, meaning 'royal', is further clouded by Rome's complicated relationship with monarchical power in the mid- and late Republic. The architectural form of a covered columnar hall with clerestory was also a new development of the same period.<sup>17</sup> Like the name, it seemingly appears out of nowhere. Although it has typological similarities with, for example, the Greek stoa, the Hypostyle Hall on Delos, banqueting rooms from Hellenistic palaces, or Egyptian and Near Eastern columnar architecture, it does not show one clear line of descent from any of these.<sup>18</sup> For the moment, however, the fact to note is that both innovations (in architecture and in

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<sup>15</sup> Plaut. *Curc.* 473, cf. *Capt.* 815. He died in 184 B.C., if we are to believe Cicero (*Brut.* 60), so his basilica cannot be the Basilica Porcia, commissioned in the same year. If we accept the statement of Livy (26.27.3) that at the time of the Forum fire of 210 B.C. *neque enim tum basilicae erant*, the emergence of the basilica at Rome can be dated more precisely to some time between 210 and 184 B.C.

<sup>16</sup> Livy 39.44.7; Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 19.2.

<sup>17</sup> The earliest phases of Rome's civic basilicas are obscured by later construction; the most recent investigations beneath the Basilica Paulli can be found in Freyberger *et al.* 2007; Ertel and Freyberger 2007. More generally, see *LTUR* s.vv. and discussion in Welch 2003. Despite the sensible caveats of Fuchs 1961, the rapid spread of the basilica form throughout Italy makes it clear that at least by the mid-2nd c. B.C. they conformed to the typology with which we are familiar. Early comparanda include the basilicas of Cosa and Pompeii, for which see Brown, Richardson and Richardson 1993, 206-28 and Ohr 1991 respectively. For more examples and an overview, see Lackner 2008, 266-71.

<sup>18</sup> General treatments include Nünnerich-Asmus 1994; Gros 1996, 235-60; Lackner 2008, 266-71. Early attempts to solve the problem were made by Lange 1885, citing Egyptian and Near eastern parallels from the public and the private sphere; also Leroux 1913 with an early mention of the Hypostyle Hall on Delos. Ward-Perkins 1954 is still useful. Important more recent proposals include Lauter 1979, 436-57, citing links with the stoa; Gaggiotti 1985, citing the Atrium Regium, which he identifies with the Plautine basilica, a hypothesis followed by Coarelli 1985, 302; Steinby 1987, 174-76; Gros 1996, 236-27; Zevi 1991; and Welch 2003 and Wilson 2005, on Hellenistic palace architecture. Welch 2003, 8-13 has an excellent summary of the controversy, with extensive bibliography; see also the reply of Gaggiotti 2004.

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nomenclature) belong to the very end of the 3rd c. and the early 2nd c. B.C. The emergence of the basilica was just one symptom of a period of rapid architectural development in both public and private architecture at Rome. More Romans than ever before were visiting the great Hellenistic royal capitals, and these generals, ambassadors, businessmen, and travellers brought back new ideas and the motivation for change. These same men also brought back enough wealth (not to mention materials, architects, and artisans) to make it happen.<sup>19</sup> They did not limit their innovations to the public or the private realm, but forged ahead in both.

Evidence for the developments in domestic architecture is both literary and archaeological. Cicero (*Off.* 1.138) describes the house of Octavius thus:

Gnaeus Octavius, who was the first of his family to be made a consul, was honoured, we are told, for having built a splendid home, such as gives one great standing, upon the Palatine. That house, open as it was to the public gaze, is thought to have won for its master, a 'new man', votes for his consulship. Scaurus demolished it and built an annex to his own dwelling.

Gnaeus Octavius was consul in 165 B.C. While the last sentence is a *locus classicus* for the building mania of the Late Republic, the passage as a whole shows that change was already afoot in the first half of the 2nd c. B.C. Literary anecdotes like that of the Hymettian marble columns which adorned the house of Crassus Orator in c.100 B.C.<sup>20</sup> can flesh out the picture, and archaeology confirms it. The old 6<sup>th</sup>-c. houses on the lower slopes of the Palatine were kept in more or less the same form until c.200 B.C.; only then were they rebuilt in a frenzy of updating and competition in luxury that lasted to the end of the Republic.<sup>21</sup> It is clear that great changes were occurring in domestic architecture at just the time that the basilica appeared, fully-formed, in a public context. Both developments were part of the same

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<sup>19</sup> Gros 1978 illuminates the process well.

<sup>20</sup> Plin. *HN* 17.6 and 36.7.

<sup>21</sup> Carandini 1990; Papi 1998; Carandini and Papi 2005.



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phenomenon – one embedded in the spiralling aristocratic competition of the middle and late Roman Republic.

In their name and in their architectural form, basilicas made direct allusions to Hellenistic palace architecture.<sup>22</sup> The large columned dining-halls of Alexandria, best known from a description of Ptolemy IV's barge,<sup>23</sup> were one possible model for the large hall encircled by columns and lit from a clerestory. The Roman patrons who developed and continued the building type both in public and in private hoped that both they and their buildings would benefit from an association with regal wealth, power and charisma, and with the personal power of the king.<sup>24</sup> The palaces from which their halls derived belonged to both public and private spheres: they were simultaneously the residence of the king and his household and important civic buildings. It is not too surprising, then, that in Rome reminiscences of palatial architecture can be traced in both public and private buildings. The same halls would also inspire a type of private dining-room, Vitruvius' *oecus Aegyptius*, which again featured a central roofed space, columns around, and a clerestory.<sup>25</sup> Patrons who commissioned such *oeci* were openly advertising their desire to live in Ptolemaic-style splendour.

Roman moralizing discourse labelled the new extravagance in private building with the negatively-charged word *luxuria*, connecting it with an un-Roman lack of restraint

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<sup>22</sup> Welch 2003; Wilson 2005.

<sup>23</sup> The description is at Ath. 5.205b; for reconstructions and further argumentation on the link with the basilica, see Wilson 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Gaggiotti 1985 argues for a particular connection between the Aemilii and the Ptolemies, which their choice of basilica form was intended to monumentalize. It may be so, but is not necessary: all the patrons of the period were eager to play the role of Hellenistic monarch. See further Rawson 1975; Hölscher 1990; Bell 2004, esp. 151-98. The argument of Gaggiotti 2004 that the kings referred to with the name 'basilica' were the archaic kings of Rome may have relevance to the original function of the Atrium Regium, but by the time multiple basilicas were under construction in the centre of Rome the spatial needs of real kings, Roman or Hellenistic, were entirely secondary to the regal pretensions of contemporary aristocrats, and these were expressed in Hellenistic style.

<sup>25</sup> Vitr. 6.3.9.

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coming from too much exposure to the world of the Hellenistic kingdoms.<sup>26</sup> But the connections the critics drew between new architectural styles and Hellenistic *truphe* were lifted directly from the same rhetoric patrons of the new buildings actively embraced: they deliberately alluded to Hellenistic styles as a form of cultural capital.<sup>27</sup> In Campania, multi-columned peristyles, embellished with materials shipped from afar and decorated in styles which would have been at home on Delos or at Pergamum, marked householders as cosmopolitan, wealthy, and up-to-date.<sup>28</sup> We should assume the same for Rome, but on a grander scale. There homeowners who could boast of consulships and triumphs were not merely interested in advertising their membership of a pan-Mediterranean cultural elite, but in playing the part of Hellenistic kings.<sup>29</sup>

Basilical architecture participated in a grandiose, columnar style, inflected by temple and temenos architecture, but also by the adoption of that architecture in Hellenistic royal and Roman elite domestic contexts. We should not jump to label it 'public' in and of itself. It fitted into both public and private discourses, indeed serving to blur the boundaries between them. The early basilica, an architectural type having a formal relationship to Hellenistic palaces, was used for a variety of commercial, civic, and recreational purposes that were both 'public' and 'private' in multiple senses. In the Middle Republican context, such a description reminds us of nothing so much as of the elite house.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Most famously, Livy 39.6, and (with specific reference to architecture) Sall. *Cat.* 12. Edwards 1993, 137-72 offers a full discussion of the moral dimension; most recently, see Zanda 2011.

<sup>27</sup> On the cultural valency of 'Greekness' in Rome of the 2nd c. B.C., see Gruen 1992. More recently, though with a focus on a later period, see Wallace-Hadrill 2008, esp. 169-90 on Vitruvius.

<sup>28</sup> In Campania: Smith 1994; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 17-37; Dickmann 1997. The archaeological evidence for Rome itself is much more meagre, but note especially Papi 1998 on the addition of a garden room to one of the houses at the foot of the Palatine.

<sup>29</sup> Jamie Sewell points out to me that these men saw Hellenistic kings not even as their equals, but as their inferiors: they would have wanted to live at least as well as, if not better than, the kings whose power paled before their *imperium*, and whom in several cases they had defeated on the battlefield.

<sup>30</sup> Potter 2011 draws even stronger links between the palace and the *domus*, proposing that the Roman elite household came close in practice to the Hellenistic court.

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### **Continuities between the civic basilica and the elite house**

To understand the change which occurred in both public and private architecture in the period under discussion, we must consider what came before. The early basilicas we know most about, those which surrounded the Forum Romanum, stood on what had until that point been private land. We have precise details from Livy in two cases. The money used was at least partly from censorial funds, which may mean that official records survived, and perhaps the historian had access to them. He writes (39.44.7) that Cato as censor in 184 B.C. *in publicum emit* – 'bought for public ownership' – the Atrium Maenium, the Atrium Titium, and four *tabernae* to use the land for his new basilica.<sup>31</sup> In 169 B.C., the censor Tiberius Sempronius performed a similar transaction (Livy 44.16.10):

Tiberius Sempronius, out of the money assigned to him, bought for public ownership the house of Publius Africanus behind the Tabernae Veteres towards the statue of Vertumnus and the butchers and tabernae attached to it and had a basilica built, which afterwards was called the Basilica Sempronia.

The same source gives more clues about the function of the earlier buildings. In the case of the Basilica Sempronia, the purpose is specified: a house and some commercial spaces, securely identified by the name of the householder and the professions of the shopkeepers. The buildings acquired by Cato are less fully explained: they are merely named as *atria* and *tabernae*. We can recognise the *tabernae* in the small shops which continued to line the forum after the basilicas were built and are archaeologically attested in front of the Basilica Aemilia.<sup>32</sup> The *atria* are more difficult to parse. They were clearly privately-owned because they had to be purchased. A comparison between Cato's and Sempronius' purchases suggests on first reading that the Atrium Titium and the Atrium Maenium were large elite *domus*

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Plut. *Vit. Cat. Mai.* 19.2, confirming the use of censorial funds.

<sup>32</sup> Ertel and Freyberger 2007; Freyberger *et al.* 2007; in general on the *tabernae* of the Forum see especially *LTUR* V (1989) 10-12, s.v. "Tabernae Argentariae" (E. Papi); Papi 2002.

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analogous to the house of Scipio Africanus,<sup>33</sup> but this interpretation is by no means assured, since there are other *atria* attested in the forum which seem to have had various non-domestic functions, and whose ownership status is less clear.<sup>34</sup> In any case, at least one of the earliest Roman basilicas, the Basilica Sempronia, was built on a site where an elite house had previously stood.

Elite houses were multi-purpose spaces, containing areas visually and sometimes practically accessible to all comers and used for commercial and political business.<sup>35</sup> Yet however 'public' (visible, accessible) they became, elite houses remained private. Even their most accessible areas were intimately connected to the person of the householder, serving as stages on which he could display his individual successes to a wide audience as well as to invited guests.<sup>36</sup> The house of Scipio Africanus himself, facing onto Rome's most public square, would have been a fine example of this kind of space; today we might reasonably call it 'semi-public', but we should not forget that it was also semi-private.

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<sup>33</sup> The existence of privately-owned, residential spaces so close to the Forum Romanum seemed unlikely to some earlier scholars, who preferred to see them as civic buildings; the idea that they should be 'atria publica' was first advanced by Welin 1953, 179-219. The persistence of the idea that they were public is partly down to the model of the so-called 'atria publica' at Cosa, a parallel which has proved oddly enduring despite the fact that the Cosa atria are now understood entirely differently. The 2nd c. buildings immediately surrounding the forum at Cosa, which have the layout of atrium houses, were excavated and published by Brown 1980, 33-36; Brown, Richardson and Richardson 1993, 101-3. Eager to see the Cosan forum as a carefully-designed public space which fitted his idea of the nature and purpose of the colony, Brown proposed that these buildings could not be houses since, according to his interpretation, they were not provided with *cubicula* or other living quarters; instead, they were understood to have civic or commercial functions. With these for a parallel, it was then asserted that the atria attested around the Forum Romanum must also have been civic buildings: Coarelli 1985, 45; Gros and Torelli 1988, 97; *LTUR* I (1993) 135 s.v. "Atrium Maenium" (F. Coarelli); Torelli 1995, 193-94; Gros 1996, 237-38. More recently, however, further examination of the atria at Cosa has shown without a doubt that these were indeed domestic buildings, well supplied with living spaces (even without postulating a second storey). Room G of house 5 is even paved with a mosaic which leaves the shape of a bed in negative: Fentress and Rabinowitz 1996; Fentress 2003, 14-23. The parallel must therefore be turned on its head; if Cosa had a forum lined with houses of the local elite, then why not Rome? So, e.g., *LTUR* II (1995) 329, s.v. "Forum Romanum (the Republican period)" (N. Purcell); Welch 2006, 501. For further parallels from Alba Fucens, Fregellae and Paestum (each suggestive but none as fully-realised as that of Cosa), see Sewell 2010, 137-46. For discussion of the Cosa controversy as a whole, see Fentress 2000; on its application to Rome, see now Gros and Torelli 2007, 124-26, refining their earlier suggestion and seeing some atria as having public functions, others as residential; and Sewell 2010, 146-49.

<sup>34</sup> I explore these semi-public atria in Russell (2016) 84-87.

<sup>35</sup> *Vitr.* 6.5.1-2; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 10-14.

<sup>36</sup> In general on the symbolism of the house as standing for the owner and his place in political life, see especially Wiseman 1987. Also see Bodet 1997; Rilinger 1997; Hales 2003; Hölkeskamp 2004; von Hesberg 2005; Beck 2009. On Pompeii, see Dickmann 1999.

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In elite houses activities from meetings of magistrates' *consilia* to commercial transactions took place. These same activities also took place in public, in civic spaces such as the early basilicas. When a house was replaced by a basilica, there was more than just a spatial continuity: there was also a continuity of function. What is more, the similarity was not restricted to practical functions but extended to the symbolic power of these buildings. Just like elite houses, the new civic basilicas served as monuments to their individual patrons and their family.

The basilicas which later surrounded the Forum were built by individual patrons. The first we know of is Cato's in 184 B.C., followed closely by the Basilica Fulvia in 179 and the Basilica Sempronia in 169. These early patrons were acting as censors; later, Lucius Opimius and Caesar may have been consuls or proconsuls when they commissioned their basilicas.<sup>37</sup> Still, they never stopped acting as individuals and representatives of their family.<sup>38</sup> The same can be said for almost all public building in the Republic: individuals took the lead, and individuals took the credit.<sup>39</sup> When Sempronius bought Africanus' house, tore it down, and replaced it with a basilica which he named after himself, he was not making private space public in anything but the driest legal sense. Though he used public money to do it, he was

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<sup>37</sup> Basilica Opimia: Opimius restored the Temple of Concord as consul in 121 B.C. (App. *B Civ.* 1.26; Plut. *Vit. C. Gracch.* 17). The Basilica Opimia was nearby (Varro, *Ling.* 5.156) and thus probably part of the same construction project, but no source actually mentions the date of its construction. Basilica Julia: Cic. *Att.* 4.16.8 seems to refer to the restoration and construction of two basilicas simultaneously in 54 B.C. (so the Basilica Paulli and the Basilica Julia), but the interpretation of the passage is debated. See further Coarelli 1985, 234-35 with bibliography. For an alternative explanation, see Wiseman 1993 (though see below on the identification of the Basilica Aemilia).

<sup>38</sup> See now Steinby 2012, esp. 82.

<sup>39</sup> Tension between individual patrons and the community (most often represented by the Senate as arbiter of limits to elite competition) is represented in everything from the unauthorized statues cleared from the Forum in 158 B.C. (Plin. *HN* 34.30) to Pompey's attempt to wriggle around the apparent taboo against permanent theatres (Tert. *De spec.* 10.5).

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making his own personal, private claim to a victory in Rome's rough-and-tumble political competition.<sup>40</sup>

The basilicas served the needs of the people as a whole by providing extra space out of the elements for commercial, political, and judicial activities, and contributing to the monumentalization and beautification of the city's central square. For the patrons, however, their chief function was as testimonials to the power, achievements, and beneficence of the donor and his family. Whether they saw the benefits of building chiefly as aids to future electoral success for themselves or their descendants, or felt a more abstract need to make their mark on Rome's built fabric as a repository of communal memory, they were keen to impress. The practicality and beauty of their benefactions both served the same purpose, since a well-used building was a better monument than an ignored one.<sup>41</sup> The monumentality of the basilica, its forest of columns, and its association (known at least from later examples) with sumptuous decoration all made it a prime choice for a patron looking to display his munificence on a grand scale. Viewers would have been acutely conscious of the patron's wealth and power. The magnificent *beneficium* the building represented placed the visitor under an obligation to its builder, and a monumental dedicatory inscription left him in no doubt of who that was. The overall experience of visiting a basilica cannot have been so different to the experience of visiting the semi-public area of an elite house: although there were vast differences in scale, both hosted similar gatherings and played the same role in displaying the glory of patron and family.

The best evidence that basilicas could be used, like houses, as display spaces specifically for individuals and their *gentes* is the continuing connections recorded between

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<sup>40</sup> The conqueror of Hannibal was already dead, and there is no need to read this as a specific slight against the Cornelii Scipiones; the message was a more general one.

<sup>41</sup> For Nünnerich-Asmus 1994, 6-7, the success of the basilica as a form of *Repräsentationsarchitektur* is closely linked with its utility as civic space, which in Cato's time was sorely needed.

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them and the families that built them.<sup>42</sup> One reason that much ink has been spilled over the question of Rome's first basilica is that, despite Plautus' use of the word *basilica* for a pre-Catonian building, the author of the *de Viris Illustribus* writes that Cato the Elder *basilicam suo nomine primus fecit* – 'was the first to build a basilica in his own name'.<sup>43</sup> What the author means is not that Cato built the first basilica, but that he was the first to build a basilica and name it after himself. I referred above to Livy's account of its construction. Plutarch also reports it, stating that it was built with public money, that it was located next to the Forum, below the Curia, and that there was opposition in the Senate to its construction.<sup>44</sup> What was it about the building that so angered the Senate? None of the individual aspects of the project were unprecedented: censors frequently built extravagant civic buildings, they often built monuments named after themselves in prominent locations with public money, and privately-funded monuments bearing individuals' names stood all around the Forum.<sup>45</sup> Rather, it was the combination of all these factors in the context of political competition which the Senate found untenable. Cato's basilica was not an arch or a statue, a road or an aqueduct, but a building with obvious political functions. No other public meeting place on the Forum was named for an individual save the Curia Hostilia, which commemorated a safely mythical king. For the first time, a substantial civic space, which would be used as the headquarters of a major component of Rome's political system (the *tribuni plebis*), which was topographically linked to the Comitium and directly adjoining the Curia itself, was to be built by and named after a contemporary politician. The senators knew that the name would

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<sup>42</sup> Nünnerich-Asmus 1994, 10-11.

<sup>43</sup> Plaut. *Capt.* 815, *Curc.* 473; *De vir. ill.* 47.

<sup>44</sup> Plut. *Vit. Cat. Mai.* 19.2.

<sup>45</sup> Welch 2003, 6 n.5 notes, 'earlier monuments named after individuals, such as the Via Appia, Aqua Appia and Circus Flaminius, had all been located outside the city center'. But Cato himself had bought and demolished buildings known as the Atrium Maenium and Atrium Titium for his basilica; while these were perhaps named after families rather than individuals, one could also cite the Maeniana, the fornix of Scipio Africanus on the Clivus Capitolinus, and the column of Duilius. See Steinby 2012, 44 and *passim*.

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give Cato and his descendants a powerful individual association with this politicized space which was legally and ideologically supposed to be the property of the entire *populus* – and they were right.

Cato won the argument and built his basilica. When, over a century later, the tribunes wished to remove a pillar which was obstructing their bench, the younger Cato made his maiden speech in opposition to the alteration and, despite his inexperience, was successful in stopping it.<sup>46</sup> We are not told anything about his reasons, but Plutarch says his speech was full of substance and calls it a sign of his good character. It can only have been an appeal to the traditions of his family, and one which his audience found persuasive. The fact that the building had legally been out of his family's hands for four generations was trumped by the perseverance of a relationship between the Porcii and the space of the Basilica Porcia.

The Basilica Paulli, which was built by L. Aemilius Paullus in 55 B.C. along the north long side of the Forum, serves as another example of a publicly-owned basilica which nevertheless retained an enduring connection to its original patron and his family.<sup>47</sup> It was rededicated by L. Aemilius Lepidus Paullus in 34 B.C.<sup>48</sup> When it burned in 14 B.C., it was rebuilt with money furnished primarily by Augustus himself, but an Aemilius was still allowed to play the part of its official patron.<sup>49</sup> Finally, in A.D. 22, it was restored once more by another Aemilius.<sup>50</sup>

This length of association between the building at the Aemilii is remarkable in itself, but if, as is generally accepted, the intervention of Paullus in 55 B.C. was itself a restoration of the earlier Basilica Aemilia, we can trace the family link with the building back even

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<sup>46</sup> Plut. *Vit. Cat. Min.* 5.1-2. It is not clear at what point the association between the Basilica Porcia and the tribunate began; see David 1983 for a sceptical view.

<sup>47</sup> Paullus' building: Cic. *Att.* 4.16.14; App. *B Civ.* 2.26.

<sup>48</sup> Dio Cass. 49.42.

<sup>49</sup> Dio Cass. 54.24.

<sup>50</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.72.



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further.<sup>51</sup> In 179, a new basilica was built *post argentarias novas* (thus in the same spot as the later Basilica Paulli).<sup>52</sup> Livy (40.51) records its patron as the censor M. Fulvius Nobilior, and not his colleague M. Aemilius Lepidus. If Livy is correct, then the obvious name for the structure would be the Basilica Fulvia. Yet there was definitely a Basilica Aemilia in the forum before Paullus' intervention of 55 B.C., and Varro tells us that in 159 the censor P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica placed a water-clock in the 'Basilica Aemilia et Fulvia', implying that the Basilica Aemilia and the Basilica Fulvia were one and the same.<sup>53</sup>

Just like the later Basilica Paulli, the Basilica Aemilia itself demonstrates a close link with the family memorialized in its name. The Aemilii were understandably proud of the magnificent building, and in 61 L. Aemilius Paullus, the future triumvir, placed it on coins.<sup>54</sup> All these links belong in the world of family prestige and political manoeuvring, already predicated on a delicate balance between the interests of the SPQR as a whole and those of an individual or family. But the most telling sign of how the Aemilii wanted others to see their basilica was the decision of M. Aemilius Lepidus, consul of 78 B.C., to decorate it with shields. Pliny tells us that Lepidus placed shields *non in basilica modo Aemilia, verum et domi suae* – 'not only in the Basilica Aemilia, but also in his own house'.<sup>55</sup> The visual link

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<sup>51</sup> The theory proposed in Steinby 1987 that the Basilica Fulvia was along the N (long) side of the Forum, while the Basilica Aemilia of 179 was on the E (short) side, has not been widely accepted: Patterson 1992 summarizes the various arguments. Steinby 2012 (see esp. 54-56, 59-61, 73-74) has now offered a partial reworking: while maintaining the proposal that there was a Basilica (or possibly Porticus) Aemilia on the E (short) side of the square, she follows a suggestion of Chioffi 1996, 39 to argue that the Basilica Fulvia of 179 was later restored by an Aemilius (probably Paullus in his censorship in 164) and henceforth known as the Basilica Fulvia Aemilia.

<sup>52</sup> Livy 40.51.

<sup>53</sup> Varro, *Ling.* 6.4.

<sup>54</sup> *RRC* 419/3. Given the prominence of the shields (for which see below) on the coin, it is hard to argue that this can be any building other than the Basilica Aemilia (*contra* Weigel 1989; Steinby 2012, 61-62, n.194). The coins cannot, of course, tell us anything about its location. On the relationship between coins and monuments as instruments of self-advertisement, see Meadows and Williams 2001.

<sup>55</sup> Plin. *HN* 35.15.

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between the house and basilica of the Aemilii emphasised both the political activities of the house's inhabitants and those same individuals' personal patronage of the basilica.<sup>56</sup>

The civic basilicas stood on ground at least in part previously occupied by private houses. The names they were given emphasised their patrons' families. Their architectural form and decoration was hybrid, drawn from a world which was simultaneously residential and civic: the world of Hellenistic royal palaces. These elements drew their symbolic power precisely from the fact that they were connected both to political importance on a national scale and to the charismatic individual power of royalty. And it was the very same elements which powerful householders simultaneously were installing in the accessible parts of their own houses in order to lend a sense of grandeur and cosmopolitanism. Finally, even in function the civic basilicas recreated the *loca communia* of an elite *domus* on a much larger scale: areas used for commercial and political business and to impress visitors with the patron's wealth, taste, and power.<sup>57</sup>

### **Conclusion: public and private within and beyond the house**

In the passage quoted at the outset Vitruvius clearly links public and private architectural typologies: basilicas in houses are analogized to public ones, being decorated in a way which recalls the *magnificentia* of public buildings. His explanation for their presence in a domestic context is that public business is carried out there. One obvious interpretation is that the basilica belongs essentially to the public realm, so that in the domestic context it signals the semi-public nature of the space. I have discussed civic basilicas in order to add nuance to this interpretation. For their original audiences, they were not only (or even primarily) public buildings, but also grandiose statements of an individual family's power.

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<sup>56</sup> The essential continuity between these 'public' and 'private' modes of commemoration is noted by Hölscher 1978. For further discussion of the Basilica Aemilia as a family monument, see Cadario 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Vit. 6.5.1.

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Roman domestic architecture was flexible, able to accommodate multiple variations of both public and private space. When we talk about public space extending into the house, or patrons at home borrowing from public architecture, we assume that public space was not so flexible: that everything beyond the house can be identified as unproblematically public. Such an understanding of what is 'public' does not match the nuance now attached to our understanding of the 'private'.<sup>58</sup> In this case, it is more or less assumed that the basilica is by its nature a public form. Given how little we know about the origin of the basilica as a type, that is a dangerous assumption. It is not impossible that Rome's first basilica was neither the Basilica Porcia nor the enigmatic basilica mentioned by Plautus, but a particularly opulent room in a private house.

We cannot prove that the homes in which the builders of Rome's first civic basilicas lived were adorned with rooms called basilicas or of a similar architectural design. But a consideration of Rome's civic basilicas and their functions not only as public spaces but as individual monuments can still help us understand not only one passage in Vitruvius but also the Roman house more broadly and its relationship with public architecture and public space. When Vitruvius wrote that elite houses should contain basilicas, he did not necessarily mean that private architecture should copy public architecture.<sup>59</sup> Rather, the basilica itself belongs at least in part to the private sphere. The influence goes in both directions. Romans looking to signify public grandeur and political importance within their homes made use of features like the basilica, while the patrons of civic basilicas drew ideas and symbolism from private space. The elite houses and enigmatic 'atria' which originally stood around the Forum

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<sup>58</sup> The legalistic approaches of Zaccaria Ruggiu 1995 and Capogrossi Colognesi 1999 have much to offer, but do not match the attention to lived space that has been brought to bear on study of the Roman house. Recently, the papers in Dardenay and Rosso 2013 have begun the process of rebalancing the equation.

<sup>59</sup> I owe to Andrew Wallace-Hadrill the observation that the two other features with which Vitruvius groups the basilica – the library and the picture-gallery – are even more easily understood as signifying 'private' rather than 'public'.

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occupied a position between domestic and civic, public and private, and their example helped the patrons of the first basilicas to create civic buildings which continued to participate in a dialogue between civic activity and individual power. Vitruvius' application of the word 'basilica' to spaces both at home and on the Forum highlights the lack of a strict distinction between public and private in domestic space; the relationship between the civic basilica and its domestic equivalent depends on even closer links between concepts of public and private, as well as between domestic and civic architecture. Domestic and civic architectural typologies in mid-Republican Rome developed in tandem, and we cannot understand one without the other; similarly, we cannot understand the operation of public space within the house without considering elements of the private which extended beyond the house.

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